18th CONGRESS,
2d SESSION.

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MEMORIAL

OF

SUNDRY MERCHANTS, (AND OTHERS,)

CITIZENS OF NEW YORK,

PRAYING CONGRESS TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION

The subject of Piracies

Committed on the Commerce of the United States,

BY

VESSELS FROM THE ISLAND OF CUBA, &c.

DECEMBER 18, 1824.

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MEMORIAL.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

The citizens of New York solicit the attention of your Honorable Body to a subject of the deepest interest, affecting, equally, the commerce and revenue of the nation, the lives of our citizens, and the prosperity of a most respectable class of merchants.

The trade to the Island of Cuba has for many years been increasing, and has now become one of the most valuable branches of our foreign commerce. In its importance to the Union, it is not inferior to our trade with France and all her colonies. It is a most advantageous market for our produce and manufactures; furnishes us with many useful articles of consumption; employs a vast amount of American tonnage; is a nursery for our seamen; and yields a large revenue to our Treasury. This trade was prosecuted, until within a few years past, with but little interruption; but, in consequence of wars in the different Spanish provinces, which have had the effect greatly to weaken the sense of moral obligation, and, from a partial suppression of the Spanish slave trade, many ferocious spirits have been put out of employment, and a class of men have arisen, and located themselves in different parts of that island, who seem, by their robberies and their cruelties, to emulate the bucaniers of former times.

The piracies of these men were confined, for a time, principally to plundering our vessels, and maltreating our seamen. By the exertions of the naval force under Commodore Porter, their atrocities were rendered less frequent, and a hope was entertained that they would be entirely discontinued, but this hope has proved delusive. The necessary withdrawal of our ships of war during the sickly season, the supineness or connivance of the local authorities of Cuba, and the imbecility of the Spanish Government, have conspired to renew the piratical system with increased activity and horror; whole crews have been recently murdered, their vessels burnt, and their cargoes plundered, and, in some instances, openly sold at the Matanzas or the Havana.

Without some protection to this trade more efficient than any which has yet been afforded, and better adapted to repel the attacks of these abandoned men, we are apprehensive that this great branch of our foreign commerce, and the revenues arising from it, will be materially diminished. It is a lawful commerce, and our citizens have a right to claim the protection of Government in its pursuit.

The system adopted by these bands of pirates, is to go out from their places of concealment in small open boats, attack unarmed vessels, and, by indiscriminate slaughter, to remove all chance of detection. A commerce liable to such risks cannot be prosecuted; merchants will be unwilling to expose their property, and seamen will not be willing to jeopardise their lives.

We have thus briefly stated the evils which threaten not only our direct trade to Cuba, but also our commerce to every part of the Gulf of Mexico. It is not too much to say that they are too great to be endured; and, confiding in the wisdom and justice of your honorable body, we pray that suitable and effectual measures may be speedily devised to remove them.

We would respectfully submit to the consideration of Congress, whether it would not be expedient that a law should be passed authorizing merchant vessels to arm for their own protection, under such regulations, and with such rules for their government, as may appear necessary, and which may avoid the danger of committing the peace of the nation to the discretion of individuals.

And that the squadron on the Cuba station should be re-inforced; that decoy vessels should be employed, and that the ships of war be furnished with additional launches and boats, calculated to pursue the pirates into their retreats and fastnesses.

We would further respectfully suggest that the President of the United States be requested to make suitable remonstrances to the Government of Spain, and to the authorities of Cuba, relative to the piracies committed on American vessels, and the murder of their crews, by persons issuing from the shores of that Island, and to state, most explicitly, that, if the evils are not removed, they will be held liable for the consequences.

Should such remonstrances be made, and should they be ineffectual, the citizens of New York pledge themselves to support their Government in any ulterior measures which may be necessary, even if they extend to the blockade of every part of that Island.

And your memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

A true copy of a memorial, unanimously adopted at a meeting of merchants and citizens of the City of New York, held at the Tontine Coffee House, on the 2d day of December, 1824.

WM. BAYARD, *Chairman.*

Attest,

STEPHEN ALLEN, *Secretary.*

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